

Senator Harkin: A Legacy of Nutrition & Health Promotion

“Increasing access to healthy foods – particularly among children – and giving consumers the information they need to make smart choices improves our nation’s health and our economic well-being.” – Senator Tom Harkin

Throughout his nearly 40 year career in Congress, as chair of the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee and as chair of the Senate Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry Committee, Senator Tom Harkin has played a leading role in improving the quality of the American food supply, and in ensuring that low-income individuals have ready access to sufficient and healthful food. **Among the highlights of Harkin’s work to promote health and craft a meaningful food policy:**

Championing Healthy Foods in Schools:

- Harkin played a significant role in drafting the [*Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010*](#), legislation that funded and significantly reformed the National School Lunch Program. Notably, it included a Harkin bill to set nutrition standards for snack foods in schools as well as those sold in vending machines, school stores, and a la carte lines.
- Harkin co-authored a provision in the *Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004* requiring that schools develop local wellness policies to improve students’ nutrition and health. The policies must include goals for physical education and nutrition education, and also set guidelines for the sale and availability of all foods in schools, including foods made available through vending machines, school snack bars, and a la carte lines.
- In the 2002 farm bill, Harkin authored the *Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program*, a landmark policy that provides free fresh fruits and vegetables to low-income children in schools. The program was significantly expanded in the 2008 farm bill, which invested \$1 billion over 10 years for the initiative, allowing it to serve as many as three million low-income children.

Establishing and Investing in Programs that Promote Wellness:

- Over multiple Congresses, Harkin introduced and championed the [*Healthier Lifestyles and Prevention America \(HeLP America\) Act*](#), which formed the basis of the Prevention and Public Health title of the *Affordable Care Act* (ACA) and called for further expanding access to fresh fruits and vegetables for all low-income elementary schools. The bill also included tax incentives for businesses that offer comprehensive workplace wellness programs to their employees, improved physical activity and athletic opportunities for individuals with disabilities, and greater oversight with regard to food and tobacco marketing.
- In the ACA, Harkin authored provisions to make health improvements in community settings such as schools, parks, and work places, as well as medical settings. The Prevention and Public Health title of the law includes funding for community prevention programs that encourage physical activity, good nutrition, and the reduction of tobacco use, making it easier for individuals to make healthy choices.
- Harkin introduced an amendment to *No Child Left Behind* — the *Fitness Integrated with Teaching Kids Act*, or *FIT Kids Act* — to support physical education for all public school children through grade 12, and to ensure that they are taught essential health and nutritional information.

Reducing Food Marketing to Children; Combating Childhood Obesity for a Healthier Future:

- Harkin repeatedly pressed the food industry to adopt uniform, system-wide, age-appropriate guidelines for food marketing to children.
- Harkin directed the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) to establish the study, *Food Marketed to Children* to provide recommendations for marketing and labeling of the nutritional quality of foods for children and youth. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) worked in cooperation on this effort.
- Harkin initiated and funded the Institute of Medicine Study, *Food Marketing to Youth: Threat or Opportunity*, the most comprehensive scientific review of the impact of food and beverage marketing on children and youth.

Advancing Critical Food Safety Policies and Nutrition Labeling Requirements:

- Harkin authored the *FDA Food Safety Modernization Act* to overhaul the outdated food safety system and protect consumers from contaminated foods and food-borne illness.
- Harkin negotiated and authored a provision in the ACA that extends nutrition labeling requirements to chain restaurants, giving consumers a critical tool to use in their own efforts to eat a healthful diet.
- Harkin worked to develop uniform guidelines for the use of nutrient labeling symbols or systems on the front of food packages.
- Harkin requested a two-year Institute of Medicine [study of average daily sodium intake](#) that laid out common sense strategies for reducing dangerously high sodium amounts in processed foods.

Increasing Access to Fresh and Local Foods:

- Harkin funded community food projects to establish and facilitate enterprises that produce and market foods locally.
- Harkin supported the expansion of farmers markets across the country by creating the Farmers' Market Promotion Program and by securing \$33 million in mandatory funding for the program in 2008. This was the first-ever mandatory funding for farmer's markets.
- Harkin removed an existing prohibition on acquiring locally produced foods for use in the National School Lunch Program in the 2008 farm bill.
- **With Harkin as chairman, the food assistance titles of the 2002 and 2008 farm bills invested approximately \$18 billion in federal food assistance programs over a ten-year period.**

For more information, please visit Senator Harkin's website at <http://harkin.senate.gov/>, or follow him on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/tomharkin> or Twitter <https://twitter.com/SenatorHarkin>.